The "FSIS Best Practices Guidance for Controlling Listeria monocytogenes (Lm) in Retail Delicatessens" (80 FR 33228; June 11, 2015), was developed based on the 2013 Interagency Risk Assessment-Listeria monocytogenes in Retail Delicatessens and the 2013 FDA Model Food Code to provide guidance for controlling Lm in the retail deli environment. FSIS began evaluating industry adoption of these recommendations as a pilot project in January 2016 (FY16-Q2), based on observations made by FSIS investigators.

Methods: During routine surveillance of retail delis (n=1750/year), FSIS Compliance Investigators observe whether retailers are following 33 recommendations from the guidance. Observation results were documented by answering a series of yes and no questions and recording the results in the Public Health Information System (PHIS). The results were then entered into Tableau®, a data visualization tool. Observations were evaluated based on the percentage of recommendations followed by category and the percentage of delis following the top 8 recommendations. The percentage of delis following the top 8 recommendations was identified as most important in preventing contamination with Listeria monocytogenes.

Results: The percentage of recommendations followed increased from second quarter FY2016 to second quarter FY2018 in all four categories. Specifically, product handling increased from 85% to 90%, cleaning and sanitizing 80% to 83%, facility and equipment controls 95% to 98%, and employee practices 95% to 96% (n=127,258 practices observed). The percentage of delis following all top 8 recommendations increased from 58.5% in FY16-Q2 to 65.3% in FY18-Q2. The recommendations least likely to be followed are (i) clean and sanitize equipment every 4 hours; (ii) cover RTE foods promptly; and (iii) separate RTE products from raw products.

Significance: Increasing adoption of those recommendations would be significant in decreasing the likelihood of illness in the "Interagency Risk Assessment—Listeria monocytogenes in Retail Delicatessens" would help protect public health by increasing retailers following the FDA Model Food Code and reducing risk of listeriosis from RTE meats handled at retail.

The CDC estimates listeriosis causes about 1,600 illnesses, 1,500 hospitalizations, and 260 deaths in the United States each year. Historically, listeriosis cases were often attributed to RTE meat or poultry product sliced or handled at retail or at home (e.g., delis).

FSIS encourages retailers and public health officials to review the guidance and evaluate their retail practices and interventions for reducing the risk of listeriosis to consumers from RTE meat and poultry deli products. Increasing adoption of these recommendations would increase compliance with the FDA Model Food Code and reduce risk of listeriosis from RTE meats handled at retail.